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EPHESIANS AND THE POWERS

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The Epistle to the Ephesians is a masterful work of inspired, canonical biblical literature that contains numerous famous scriptural passages and significant theological themes. Ephesians teaches us that, although we were “dead in our trespasses and sins” (2:1), God, in his mercy, has made us “alive together with Christ” by grace through faith apart from our own works (2:6–11). We learn, likewise, that in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, God has made Jews and Gentiles “one new man” (2:15) by the “blood of Christ” (2:13), reconciling us to himself “in one body through the cross” (2:16). Drawn together as one by the Spirit, states the author of Ephesians, God has made us into a temple and a dwelling place for himself (2:18–22).

It is sometimes claimed that Ephesians is the epistle of “ecclesiology,” since its focus on the church is so glorious and frequent. Yet, the theology of Ephesians is as much about pneumatology, christology, and soteriology as it is about ecclesiology. In fact, in Ephesians, all of these theological concepts are masterfully integrated into a coherent systematic whole in a concise and clear manner that is unique among the documents of the New Testament.

Most pertinent to the topic of this volume is the proposition that the author expounds in Ephesians 3:10–11, namely, that it is through the church that the truth of the Gospel is made known to “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” When the author finally gets to his famous teaching on spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:10–20, the claim of Ephesians 3:10—and of the entire epistle—is further illuminated. The church is not depicted by the author as consisting of a collection of individual salvation solo projects standing side by side in the same location. Rather, in Ephesians, the church is cast as a covenantal community of integrated co-communicants who together participate in the divine life of God (4:18; cf. Col 3:1–4; 2 Pet 1:4) “in Christ” (Eph 1:1–14) as the “one new man” in whom exists “the fullness of God” (Eph 2:15; cf. Col 3:19).

The various chapters of this volume come from different cultural and theological perspectives from within the global Christian tradition spanning geographically from Arizona to Australia and theologically from Arminianism to

Calvinism. With a diverse set of contributors and theological perspectives, there is no doubt that every reader will be challenged and strengthened in the faith as they assess, critique, and integrate the various arguments set forth in this book to their own theology and praxis of spiritual engagement with the Powers. What is striking, however, from an editorial standpoint, is that while the volume is truly theologically diverse, each piece still sits comfortably underneath a broad, orthodox evangelical tent. The common thread that binds the chapters together into a coherent whole is obvious from the title of the volume, *Ephesians and the Powers*. Yet, it is worth noting another thread of coherence in advance. Each chapter offers new and unexpected perspectives on the Powers while remaining firmly within an orthodox framework. One might suspect that reckless innovation would be required in order to bring something new to the table on the topic of spiritual Powers. Typically in theological studies, innovation in this area has involved creedal or doctrinal deviation. Specifically, on the topic of the Powers, innovation has historically included a denial of their existence or arguments that advocate for some form of demythologization. However, it is refreshing to see that new perspectives on the Powers can be arrived at without transgressing the boundaries of the historic Christian faith in ways that contribute to and strengthen orthodoxy and orthopraxy rather than assault them.

In Dan Darko's chapter, "'The Ruler of the Power of the Air' in the Salvific Story of Ephesians 2," a helpful critique is offered in which the common soteriological emphasis on salvation as a "metaphorical visa for eschatological bliss in heaven" is corrected by setting Ephesians' soteriological teachings in their proper context in relation to the Powers. Ephesians, Darko argues, is of course about salvation, but a salvation that is rooted in the reality of God's triumph over the "prince of the power of the air." Thus, reading Ephesians' soteriology in light of its pneumatology delivers a significantly more theocentric—rather than the more typically encountered anthropocentric—theological understanding of salvation in the epistle.

Soteriology gets "spatial" in two of the contributions of this volume, introducing readers to the cosmological background to the language of "the heavens" in Ephesians. In "'You Have Been Raised with Christ': Investigating the Spatial Portrait of New Creation in Ephesians," Luke Hoselton links the soteriology of Ephesians with the Pauline spatial framework of the Powers together with the theme of New Creation. Providing an entirely different, but related, perspective is Eric Covington in his contribution, "Power and the 'Powers' in Thomas Aquinas' *Lectura ad Ephesios*." Covington draws our attention to recent translations of Aquinas' exegetical work in his biblical commentaries. In his chapter, he outlines some of the key features of Aquinas' interpretation of Ephesians and the Powers, including providing a helpful overview of Aquinas' interpretation of the detailed medieval hierarchies of malevolent and benevolent spiritual forces and their relation to the soteriological arguments set forth in Ephesians.

The chapter will surely leave many (especially Protestant) readers wondering: “If Aquinas is a doctor of the Church and one of the premier theologians in Church history, why have I not read more of his commentaries?” Given that Aquinas lived before the Protestant Reformation, his brilliant work—like the work of Augustine and other luminaries from church history—belongs to the whole church. There should not be a Protestant or Catholic who gets through seminary without serious engagement with the works of Aquinas.

Three separate chapters in this volume deal directly with Ephesians 6:10–20, and each one offers a unique exegetical and theological analysis and application of the passage. First, Mark and Nancy Kreitzer offer a comparative exegesis of Pauline and Johannine texts on the themes of spiritual warfare and spiritual growth in “Three Cycles of Growth: Warfare and Spiritual Metamorphosis in John and Paul.” The Kreitzers identify a shared three-fold pattern in 1 John 2:12–14 and Ephesians 6:10–24 related to spiritual growth which has evangelistic and missional implications.

Joshua Greever, in his chapter “The Armor of God, the Gospel of Christ, and Standing Firm against the ‘Powers’ (Ephesians 6:10–20),” argues, on the basis of a careful and skillful grammatical-historical exegesis of Ephesians, that Ephesians depicts believers as being clothed in the armor of God himself in virtue of their union with Christ by faith. This divine empowerment and protection ensures that believers rely entirely on Christ in order to stand firm against the evil, supernaturally powerful, spiritual beings—the Powers. Greever’s christological reading of the Divine Armor motif through the lens of the Divine Warrior intertexts of the Old Testament leads him to clearly articulate Ephesians’ focus on the necessarily divine foundation of salvation. In this regard, Greever’s exegetical and theological insights resonate with Darko’s earlier emphases on God’s own action in the victory over the Powers and in the salvation of believers.

In “Ephesians and Evangelical Activism: The Covenantal, Corporate, and Missional Components of the Ecclesial Armor of God,” John Frederick, like the Kreitzers (and later Gomersall), detects a missional component to the armor of God metaphor. The majority of his treatment of the passage is aimed at correcting individualistic, gnostic readings of the Powers that envision the metaphor to be an extension of the ethical paraenesis in Ephesians 4:17–6:9. By recalibrating the metaphor around its corporate and covenantal context, and reframing the Powers according to Walter Wink’s phenomenology of the Powers, Frederick offers a new framework for evangelical social activism as spiritual warfare. He argues that a corporate view of both the armor of God and the Powers results in the church’s Spirit-empowered, missional engagement in the spiritual battle against the Powers as they work through human structures, systems, persons, and ideologies.

Simon Gomersall and Vicky Balabanski, both writing and working from Australia, continue the focus on contextual readings and applications of the Powers, expanding the focus to include a much-needed attentiveness to multi-cultural

exegesis and mission. Both are careful to beware of Western-centric readings that prefer to discount and dismiss the experiences and interpretations of indigenous and Global South Christians' theological affirmation of the existence of real demonic beings. In this regard, both chapters can serve to highlight a model for theological engagement that incorporates diverse cultural perspectives as a part of the faithful, global development and understanding of biblical, systematic, and practical theology.

In "Considering the Impact of Missiology on Contemporary Understandings of 'Principalities and Powers,'" Gomersall traces the trajectory in modern theology to demythologization and from demythologization back to a more comprehensive, biblical view of the Powers. The chapter then offers a unique analysis into the impetus for this re-empowerment of the Powers, so to speak, from a much needed global, missiological perspective.

Vicky Balabanski offers a valuable comparative exegesis—essential for any study of Ephesians and the Powers—in "Reading Ephesians in Dialogue with the Powers in Colossians." Noting the close connections between Colossians and Ephesians, Balabanski analyzes the Powers in both texts through the lens of a cultural comparison between indigenous Australian Christians and non-indigenous Australian Christians. The pneumatology and cosmology of Ephesians and Colossians is then read in dialogue with other ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman works thus situating the biblical text within its literary and historical context. The results provide an illuminating discourse on the Powers in Ephesians and Colossians in their theological, literary, and historical context, and a fascinating picture of Australian culture and spirituality.

In "Bonhoeffer and the Way of the Crucified: *Methodeia*, Doctrine, and the 'Powers'" Jonathan K. Sharpe and Jerry Pillay apply the concept of the *methodeia* in Ephesians 4:14 and 6:11 to doctrinal deviation as a work of demonic spiritual Powers. The chapter offers a theological interpretation of Ephesians in which this reading is applied as a critical framework through which to critique the "pyrotheology" of Peter Rollins as a form of *methodeia*.

Thus, this volume includes a collection of essays that explore the Powers as they relate to soteriology, spatial themes and cosmology, spiritual warfare, culture, and mission. Finally, the book concludes with Sharpe and Pillay's unique and important expansion of the topic of the Powers to the area of Christian doctrine.

It is a credit to the forward thinking folks at the *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* (JBTS) and Grand Canyon University/Grand Canyon Theological Seminary that volumes like this current book can be organized around a common topic, thus making the potential scholarly and ecclesial impact, as well as the theological coherence to each volume, substantially greater. The open source platform of JBTS, combined with print and theological database components, make this journal series an innovative trailblazer in the world of peer-reviewed biblical and theological publications. With easy access, a quick editorial turnaround, and

a collaborative team, we are delighted to see JBTS setting the new standard for scholarly possibilities in a manner that exudes effectiveness and excellence. The editors for this special edition volume are exceedingly grateful and satisfied with the professionalism of JBTS. We are particularly impressed with the collegial and scholarly excellence of the work of Dan Diffey, for his gracious assistance and clear direction as the preparation of the manuscripts were underway. It is with sincere thanks as well, to you the reader, that we offer this volume as a means of exploring the important implications of spiritual warfare and the Powers in the life of the Christian faith, the Church, and the mission of God for the life of the world.

And so, wherever you are on your spiritual journey, we pray that you would lean into the sovereign protection of the Spirit of the living God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ his Son, who is himself our spiritual armor, our strength, our shield, our rock of refuge, our salvation, our joy, our hope, our peace, and our perfect righteousness, now and forever, world without end.

The LORD bless you and keep you: The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. In the name of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.